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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ODIP](#) [CASC](#) [OFDP](#) [PHUM](#) [AMGT](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: CHARGE DEMARCHES MFA ON STAFFING DEMANDS, CONSULAR ACCESS

Classified By: Charge Jonathan Moore for reason 1.4 (d).

REF: A) STATE 28931
B) MINSK 191 AND PREVIOUS
C) MINSK 196

¶1. (C) Charge delivered ref A points March 20 to MFA A/S-equivalent Americas Department Director Vadim Lazerko. Noting that the USG is considering its response to the GOB's request to for the U.S. Embassy in Minsk to reduce its staff, Charge challenged the request as being inconsistent with the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. Drawing from ref A, Charge placed particular emphasis on the unusual, and potentially discriminatory, nature of the request. Charge also noted that Aleksandr Lukashenko had addressed a letter to then-President Clinton in November 1998 promising Belarus' unconditional adherence to both the letter and the spirit of the Vienna Convention. He said that Belarus' release of political prisoner Aleksandr Kozulin would be received as a significant step toward improved bilateral relations, and that the failure to release him would lead to the expansion of U.S. sanctions.

GOB VCDR Interpretation, "Request" Remain Unchanged

¶2. (C) Lazerko responded to Charge's points by restating Belarus' contention (ref B) that its demand for staff cuts were within the scope of Article 11 of the Vienna Convention that permits receiving states to request foreign missions' staff be limited to a "reasonable" size. He further noted that the request was based on the fact that the USG had taken a string of unfriendly steps toward Belarus since "1998" -- including asset freezes and travel restrictions -- and the Embassy had done little to develop ties with the Belarusian authorities.

¶3. (C) In response, Charge cited a long series of offenses against the United States (including the shootdown of a hot air balloon by the Belarusian military in 1995 that killed two private American citizens), noted that Ambassador Stewart had met with a number of senior GOB officials at the beginning of her tenure in 2006 but that other meeting requests -- for example, with Prime Minister Sidorskiy -- had never been responded to, and urged Lazerko to focus on the matters at hand. Abandoning his anti-U.S. remarks, Lazerko asked if Charge would present a list of staff the Embassy would voluntarily cut by the March 24 deadline. Charge responded only to say that he would present an official USG response by the agreed date and time.

Charge Protests Lack of Consular Access Again

14. (C) At the conclusion of the meeting, Charge raised the case of AMCIT Emanuel Zeltser, imprisoned by the BKGB for eight days without access to an American consular officer (ref C). Charge noted that the Embassy was prepared to meet with Zeltser at any time, and asked Lazerko to facilitate a meeting with the leadership of the Consular Department as soon as possible. Lazerko made no substantive reply, save to request that the case be raised again directly with the Consular Department. (Note: Charge is currently scheduled to see Consular Department Director Giro the morning of March 21 to discuss Zeltser's case. End note.)

Moore